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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006619

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SUBJECT: SENATOR LIEBERMAN'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER
SHALOM

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b , d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told Codel Lieberman November 22 that he is disappointed that Prime Minister Sharon has left the Likud, and that it is hard to say what will happen in the general elections four months from now. Shalom predicted that he and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will win the most votes among the six candidates competing in the December 19 first round of the Likud leadership elections, and that the two will face each other in a decisive second round December 22. He reiterated prior statements that Palestinian Authority President Abbas must do more to fight terrorism, and lamented the U.S. decision to not oppose the electoral participation of Hamas. Shalom argued for harsh measures against Iran and listed a number of positive results that he believes have resulted from American action in Iraq. END SUMMARY.

SHARON,S EXIT FROM LIKUD

¶12. (C) Foreign Minister Shalom expressed his disappointment that Prime Minister Sharon has left the Likud and taken 14 Likud MKs with him, and said that he fears that more Likud MKs may follow. He added, though, that those who have left the Likud might have sensed that they held weak positions within the party and might not have won electable positions on the party's Knesset list. Shalom said that it is hard to say what will happen in the elections four months from now, but that he is confident that Sharon,s new party will be a "one-man show," and not be a long-term force.

¶13. (C) Shalom predicted that he and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will win the most votes of the six candidates in the December 19 first round of the upcoming Likud leadership elections, and that the two will face each other in a decisive second round December 22. (Note: The party's full 150,000-plus members vote in the leadership races. The 3,000-member Central Committee chooses the party's Knesset list. End Note) In response to a question from Senator Lieberman about whether moderate Likud voters will participate in the primary election, Shalom said that moderates will vote for him, and that Shalom,s opponents will likely claim that his support is from Ariel Sharon,s supporters. He added that "the problem is that not many of them will vote."

ABBAS MEETING IN TUNIS AND HAMAS PARTICIPATION

¶14. (C) Shalom said that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, whom he met recently in Tunis, is "much better than Arafat, and his statements are good, but he must make the strategic decision to disarm terrorist organizations." Shalom said that he is 'very upset' about the U.S. decision to not oppose Hamas participation in the upcoming Palestinian elections. He rejected the view of some people that election participation will moderate Hamas. Hamas is now following Hizballah,s example from Lebanon, he asserted, where joining the government has made Hizballah more difficult to disarm.

IRANIAN THREAT TO EUROPE

¶15. (C) Shalom warned of Iran,s development of new long-range missiles that will be able to reach Europe, but said he was pleased with the recent what he termed European realization that Iran "is not just Israel,s problem." He argued for the need to take Iran to the Security Council and to consider economic and other sanctions on Iran. He claimed that former German Chancellor Gerhardt Schroeder recently told him that taking Iran to the Security Council would be pointless, since the UNSC members would likely decline to impose sanctions for fear of negative economic consequences. Shalom recounted that he told Schroeder that "a drop in the standard of living would be better than stopping living."

POSITIVE RESULTS FROM ACTION IN IRAQ

16. (C) Shalom listed a number of positive results in the region that he said have resulted from American action in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's loss of power, Muammar Kaddafi's new political approach in Libya, elections in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority, and new democratic rights for women in Kuwait. He added that Arabs and Muslims around the world are now less reluctant to talk to Israel, and that he is very pleased with Israeli progress with Pakistan and his own recent trip to Tunisia. Shalom said that the biggest obstacle to improved ties between Israel and the Muslim world is now Al Qaeda, which he said has targeted moderate regimes in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, and Indonesia.

17. (U) Code I Lieberman did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

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JONES